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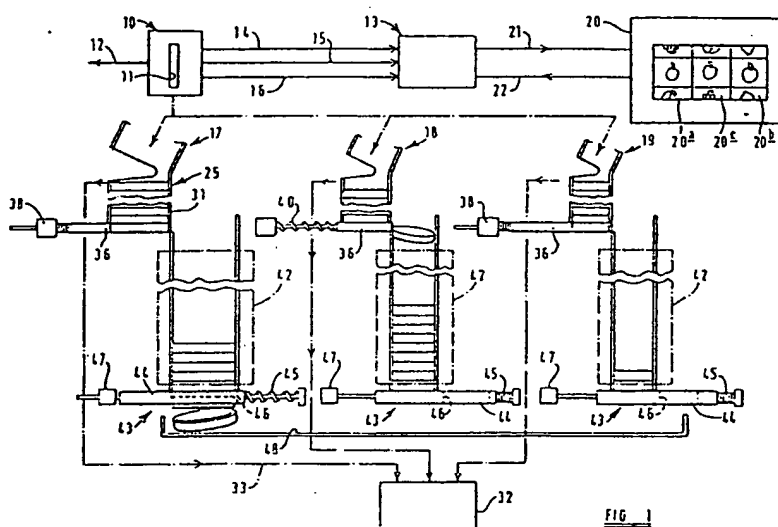
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(58) Field of search
G4V

(54) Gaming machines

(57) A gaming machine of the kind in which, at the end of a game initiated by operation of a starting means by a player, a random combination of symbols, one from each of two or more groups of different symbols (20a, 20b, 20c) is indicated, winnings being credited or paid out to the player in the event of the indicated combination of symbols being any one of a number of predetermined winning combinations, includes a coin feed mechanism (10) into which coins are fed by a player, means (17, 18, 19) to guide coins from the coin feed mechanism (10) to a coin storage compartment (41), control means (13) to randomly select a combination of symbols, a payout mechanism (43) operable under the control of said control means (13) to pay out all or substantially all the coins stored in the coin storage compartment (41) when a selected winning combination of symbols (20a, 20b, 20c) is indicated.



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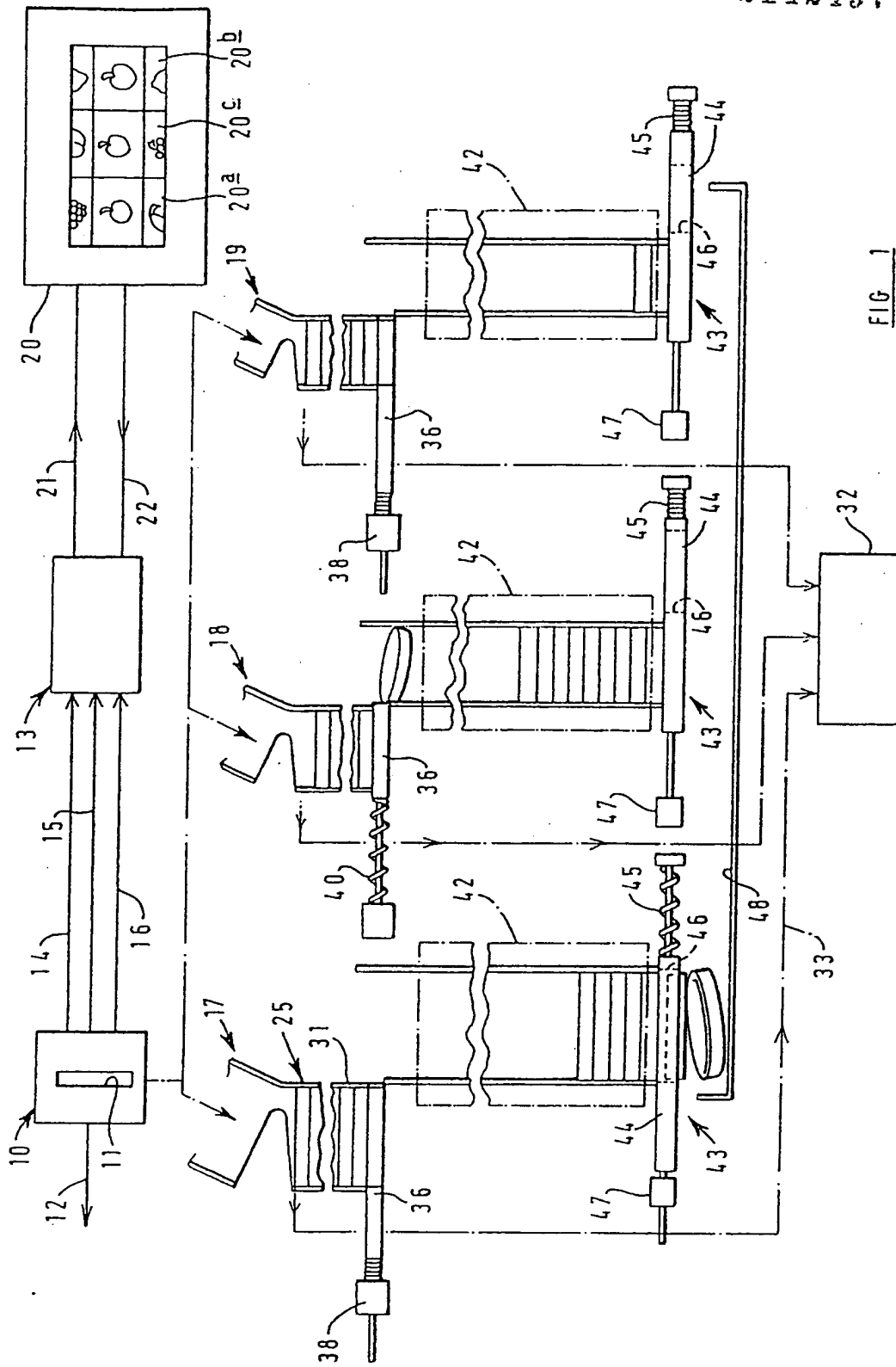


FIG. 1

SPECIFICATION

Gaming Machine

5 This invention relates to a gaming machine of the kind (hereinafter referred to as of the kind specified) commonly known as a fruit machine, and in which, at the end of a game initiated by operation of a starting means by a player, a random combination of
 10 symbols, one from each of two or more groups of different symbols is indicated, winnings being credited or paid out to the player in the event of the indicated combination of symbols being any one of a number of predetermined winning combinations,
 15 the starting means being either coin operated so that the game is started on insertion of the coin (which term includes money tokens) into the machine, or the machine may have a coin freed means adapted on insertion of a coin to render the starting means
 20 operative, the game then being started when the player operates a push button or handle.

The invention has been devised primarily but not exclusively in connection with a gaming machine of the type in which two or more groups of symbols are
 25 carried by the peripheries of a corresponding number of rotary drums or reels, the drums or reels being rotated on operation of the starting means and being arrested in random positions at the end of the game, so that a random combination of symbols is displayed
 30 through a window in the housing of the machine.

The invention is also applicable to a gaming machine of the type in which the symbols are projected onto a screen, or to a machine wherein the groups of symbols are carried by a display panel and
 35 during a game, lamps disposed behind the respective symbols of each group are illuminated in sequence, a random combination of symbols remaining illuminated at the end of the game.

According to one aspect of the invention, we
 40 provide a gaming machine of the kind specified including a coin feed mechanism into which coins are fed by a player, means to guide coins from the coin feed mechanism to a coin storage compartment, control means to randomly select a combination of symbols, a payout mechanism operable
 45 under the control of said control means to pay out all or substantially all the coins stored in the coin storage compartment when a selected winning combination of symbols is indicated.

50 Preferably, the coins in the coin storage compartment are visible through a window in a housing of the machine so that a player can determine, generally, how many coins are stored in said compartment. This can add significantly to the amusement value of
 55 the machine.

The machine may comprise a selector mechanism having a collector to collect coins fed to the selector mechanism from the coin feed mechanism, and a coin ejection device operable to eject a coin from
 60 said collector each time a pre-selected number of coins have been fed from said coin feed mechanism to said selector mechanism, the ejected coins being guided to the coin storage compartment.

65 Preferably, a plurality of selector mechanisms are provided, each accommodating coins of a single

denomination only and having its own coin storage compartment, in which case the coin feed mechanism would be operable to feed coins of one denomination only to an associated selector mechanism.

70 For example, the coin feed mechanism may have a slot for each different coin denomination accommodated by the machine and means to feed coins from their respective slots to the associated selector mechanism. Alternatively, the coin feed mechanism
 75 may have a single slot for all different coin denominations and means responsive to one or more coin parameters, such as the diameter and/or the thickness and/or the weight, to deliver a coin fed into the machine to the associated selector mechanism.

80 Of course, the coin feed mechanism may have the usual sensors and the like to test that the coin introduced is a valid coin of the realm or a valid money token, and a coin denomination accommodated by the machine, and reject means may be
 85 provided to reject any coins which do not pass the test applied. Thus the coin feed mechanism would not feed any rejected coin to the or any selected mechanism.

If desired, where more than one selector mechanism is provided, when a selected winning combination of symbols is indicated, the payout mechanism of the machine may be arranged to pay out all the coins in one of the coin storage compartments only, or more than one of the coin storage compartments of the selector mechanisms. Preferably however, the coins in one compartment only are paid out and the coin storage compartment which is emptied, is
 90 determined randomly by the control means of the machine when a selected winning combination of symbols is displayed although alternatively, where there is more than one winning combination, payout from which coin storage compartment may depend on which winning combination is indicated. Alternatively, the coin storage compartment emptied may depend on the coin denomination last inserted into the machine. For example, if a game is played upon
 95 insertion of a 10p coin (or equivalent money token) and a winning combination of symbols is indicated, the payout mechanism may pay out coins stored in the compartment containing 10p coins.
 100

Preferably however, a control means of the machine selects at random which coin storage compartment to empty, which further adds to the amusement of the machine.

115 The control means of the machine may be operable to count the number of coins fed from the coin feed mechanism to the or each selector mechanism and to signal a coin ejection device to eject a coin to the coin storage compartment, when the pre-selected number of coins have been counted.
 120

The payout mechanism for the or each coin storage compartment may comprise a gate which may be movable from a normally closed position wherein coins are prevented from passing from the coin storage compartment, to an open position wherein the coins may pass from the coin storage compartment, and means may be provided to guide the coins which pass from the coin storage compartment to a payout chute from where the player may
 125 collect his winnings.
 130

The gate of the payout mechanism may be opened electrically, under the control of the control means, and may be closed electrically, or mechanically under the control of a spring means.

- 5 According to a second aspect of the invention, we provide, a selector mechanism for a gaming machine of the kind specified comprising a collector to collect coins fed to the selector mechanism, a coin ejection device operable to eject a coin from said collector each time a pre-selected number of coins have been fed to the selector mechanism, and means to guide said ejected coins to a coin storage compartment.

The selector mechanism of the second aspect of the invention is particularly applicable to a selector mechanism having any of the features of the selector mechanism of a gaming machine according to the first aspect of the invention.

- The collector may comprise means for enabling 20 coins fed thereto to form a stack, the coins of the stack exerting a downwards force on the lowermost coin of the stack. The coin ejection device may be operable to eject the lowermost coin of the stack and may comprise a push element which moves laterally 25 relative to the stack, to eject the lowermost coin through an opening in the collector. The push element may be solenoid or otherwise electrically actuated and is preferably resiliently biased away from said opening. If course any other type of ejection device operable to eject a coin from the collector could be utilised.

Where the ejection device comprises an electrically actuated push element, the device may operate upon receipt of a signal from a control means of the machine.

- The coin storage compartment of the or each selector mechanism may comprise a vertical, or substantially vertical tube having an inner diameter only slightly larger than the external diameter of the 40 coins to be stored therein, so that coins ejected thereto form a stack within the tube. The tube may have means for mounting a payout mechanism at the lowermost end of the tube.

The tube is preferably transparent, although may be provided with a window if required, to enable a player to view the contents of the tube.

- According to a third aspect of the invention we provide, a collector for a selector mechanism according to the second aspect of the invention, comprising a tube having an inner diameter only slightly larger than the external diameter of the coins the selector mechanism is to accommodate.

The collector may include a coin handling apparatus as claimed in our co-pending application published under number 2,127,606A. Thus when the collector is full, any coin fed to the selector mechanism subsequently, apart from ejected coins, may be directed to a cash box of the machine for the use of the machine operator. Use of a coin handling 60 apparatus such as disclosed in our co-pending application would facilitate this.

Preferably, the collector is provided as a plastics moulding, although this could be fabricated in any other material as required.

- 65 The invention will now be described with the aid of

the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of a gaming machine in accordance with the first aspect of the invention; and

- 70 *Figure 2* is a diagrammatic representation of part of a selector mechanism in accordance with the second aspect of the invention showing a collector according to the third aspect of the invention in cross-section.

75 Referring to the drawings, a gaming machine has a coin feed mechanism 10 comprising sensors to measure the weight, thickness and diameter of a coin inserted therein through a slot 11 to test whether the coin is a valid coin of the realm of a denomination accommodated by the machine, or a 80 valid money token. Of course, all these tests need not be carried out but a single test, such as a test of the weight of the coin may suffice, or an entirely different test could be made in the mechanism 10. Reject means are provided to reject any coin, as 85 shown by arrow 12, which does not pass this test, and to signal a control means 13, via line 14, 15 or 16, depending on the denomination of the coin accepted, that a coin has been accepted.

90 The coin feed mechanism 10 feeds the accepted coin to one of three selector mechanisms 17, 18, 19 depending on the denomination of the coin accepted.

- The control means 13 counts the number of coins 95 of each denomination accepted and permits actuation of a starting means, which may be coin-freed or operated by push button or a handle by a player (neither shown) which signals a reel unit 20 via line 21 to rotate three reels 20a, 20b, 20c thereof, as is 100 well known in the art. The reels of the unit 20 are stopped at random by the control means 13, contain combinations of symbols on the peripheries of the reels providing a winning line, and the control means 13 is signalled via line 22 that a, and where 105 appropriate, which, winning combination is indicated. Payout is then effected as discussed below.

The construction of each of the selector mechanisms 17, 18, 19 is very similar, the differences arising from the different size (denomination) coin each 110 mechanism 17, 18, 19 is adapted to accommodate. Hence only one selector mechanism, i.e. selector mechanism 17 will be described in detail, with particular reference to Figures 1 and 2, although like parts are indicated by the same reference numerals on mechanisms 18 and 19 in Figure 1.

- Coins which are fed to the selector mechanism 17 are received by a collector 25 thereof which comprises a tube 26 having an inner diameter d only slightly larger than the external diameter of each of the coins 120 that the selector mechanism is to accommodate.

The tube 26 has a slot 27 formed or cut therein so that the tube 26 has an upper part 30 which terminates in an inclined edge 28, and a lower part 31 having a square cut upper edge 29. The lower part 125 31 is of such length l so as to accommodate a number of coins such as indicated at C1 to C5 therein, the upper surface of the uppermost coin C1 lying parallel and adjacent to the upper edge 29. When coins are fed into upper part 30 of the tube 26, they fall under gravity towards the lower part 31. 130

When sufficient coins have been accommodated to fill the lower part 31, as shown in Figure 2, any further coin fed, such as coin C6, will bounce off the uppermost coin C1 and pass from the tube 26 via slot 27. Guide means (not shown) are provided to guide the coin C6 as it passes from the tube 26 to a cashbox 32, as indicated by arrow 33 in Figure 1.

In the lower end of the tube 26, at the lowermost position thereof, an opening 34 is provided in the wall of the tube 26, of large enough circumferential extent for a coin to pass therethrough. Opposite the opening 34, an aperture 35 is provided, of smaller circumferential extent than opening 34, but large enough to permit a push element 36 of an ejection device 37 to pass therethrough.

Upon a signal being received from control means 13, a solenoid 38 of the ejection device 37 moves the push element 36 through the aperture 35 against the force of a spring 40 which normally resiliently biases the push element 36 away from opening 34, into engagement with the lowermost coin C5 to eject the coin C5 from the tube 26 through the opening 34. This ejected coin C5 then passes into a coin storage compartment 41 comprising a further tube made of transparent plastics material, whereby the contents of the tube 41 can be viewed by a player through the tube 41 and through a window 42 in a housing of the machine. Of course, any other mechanism for ejecting coins into the compartment 41 could alternatively be used.

The inside diameter d' of the coin storage compartment 41 is substantially identical to d of the tube 26. The ejected coin C5 passes down the tube 41 under gravity, and subsequent coins similarly ejected, form a stack within the tube 41.

It can be seen that the upper edge 41a of the tube 41 is angled to improve catching of ejected coins.

The control means 13 is arranged to signal the solenoid 38 of the ejection device 37 to operate to eject a coin each time a predetermined number, e.g. five, coins of the denomination accommodated by the selector mechanism 17 have been fed from the coin feed mechanism 10, to the selector device 17 and similarly to signal the solenoid 38 of the ejector device of selector mechanism 18 to eject a coin when five coins of the denomination accommodated by the selector mechanism 18 have been fed from the coin feed mechanism 10 to the selector mechanism 18, and similarly to signal the solenoid 38 of the ejection device of selector mechanism 19 to eject a coin when five coins of the denomination accommodated by the selector mechanism 19 have been fed from the coin feed mechanism 10 to the selector mechanism 19.

Coins, which as described below, are paid out when a selected winning combination is indicated by reel unit 20, are thus fed to and stored in the coin storage compartments 41 in direct proportion to the number of coins accepted by the coin feed mechanism 10.

In the event that upon playing a game, no winning combination of symbols is indicated by reel unit 20, there is of course no pay out to the player. Any number of combination of symbols may be arranged to be winning combinations as desired. In the event

that a winning combination of symbols is indicated, for example if all three of the symbols indicated are identical, the machine is adapted to pay out as described below. Additionally, if required, or instead of paying out for some of the winning combinations, the machine may be adapted to credit the player with one or more plays for which he does not need to insert a coin.

To achieve payout, when a selected winning combination is indicated, a payout mechanism 43 is provided for each selector mechanism 17, 18, 19. Each payout mechanism comprises a gate 44 which normally closes the lower end of the coin storage compartment 41 with which it is associated, and is retained in this position by spring means 45, although any other type of resilient biasing means may be provided, or may be omitted altogether and the gate 44 returned to the position shown at selector mechanisms 18, 19 by electrical means.

However, each gate 44 shown has an aperture 46 therein large enough to permit the coins stored in the coin storage compartment 41 above to pass therethrough. Normally, this aperture 46 is not in a position to permit the coins to pass through as shown at selector mechanism 18, 19 but when a solenoid 47 is actuated upon receipt of a signal from the control means 13, as shown at selector mechanism 17, the gate 44 is moved against the force of the spring 45 until the aperture 46 is beneath the stack of coins stored in the compartment 41. Hence the coins pass from the coin storage compartment 41 under gravity through the aperture 46 and fall into a payout chute 48 therebeneath, from where a player can remove his winnings. Of course, any other payout means for opening the lower end of the coin storage compartment to permit the coins stored therein to pass therethrough, when a selected winning combination is indicated, can be used.

The control means 13 may be arranged, upon a selected winning combination of symbols being indicated, to select at random which payout mechanism 43 associated with which selector mechanism 17, 18, 19 to actuate so that a player will not know before playing a game, either whether he will win the game or which coins he can see through windows 42 he will win.

If the machine is also arranged to credit a player with free plays, the player may be credited with a free play or plays when either selected winning combinations are indicated, or the control means may be adapted to randomly operate one of the payout mechanisms 43 of the selector mechanisms 17, 18, 19 so that the player wins coins or to credit a player with a predetermined or randomly selected number of free plays instead. Further alternatively, which payout the player receives upon a winning combination being indicated, or whether the player merely wins a number of free plays, may depend on which symbols of the reels 20a, 20b, 20c are indicated. For example, a lefthand reel 20a may have on its periphery three oranges, any one of which may occupy the leftmost position in a winning combination of symbols. When one of the oranges is indicated in the leftmost position and comprises part of a winning combination, the control means 13 may

be signalled to operate the payout 47 of selector mechanisms 17, whilst if another of the oranges of that reel occupies this position the payout mechanism 43 of selector mechanism 18 may be actuated, and if the other orange of the reel 20a occupies that position as part of a winning combination, the payout mechanism of selector mechanism 19 may be actuated.

Of course, any alternative required arrangement may be constructed wherein the payout or whether a player wins free games, is determined in accordance with the actual position of one or more symbols of the reels 20a, 20b, 20c when a winning combination is achieved.

Alternatively, the payout selected by the control means 13 may depend upon the denomination of the last coin inserted into the slot 11. For example if a 10p coin is inserted into slot 11 and the selector mechanism 17 is adapted to accommodate 10p coins, the payout may be from the coin storage compartment 41 of selector mechanism 17.

In this event, the windows 42 may not be provided so that a player cannot see how many (generally) coins are in the coin storage compartment 41 which accommodates 10p coins.

Further alternatively, if desired each game played, whether a winning game or not, may cause the coin storage compartment which would pay out on the next winning game to progress. For example, in one play, if a win is achieved, the coins from the coin storage compartment 42 of selector mechanism 17 may be paid out. On the next play, the coins in the storage compartment 18 may or may not be paid out depending upon whether or not a win is achieved. On the next play, the coins from the coin storage compartment 42 of selector mechanism 19 may or may not be paid out depending upon whether or not a win is achieved. The coin storage compartment 42 from which payout may be made may be indicated before and/or during play, for example by an indicating light.

It will be appreciated that normally, where coins of greater value than the lowest denomination accommodated are inserted, the player is usually credited with a number of plays. For example a 10p coin may permit one play only whilst a 20p coin permits two plays and a 50p coin permits five plays before further coins are required. Thus the coin feed mechanism 10 may be adapted to credit a player with a number of plays depending on the denomination of coin inserted, if this facility is required.

Many modifications may be made to the machine described without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, although in the machine described there are three reels 20a, 20b, 20c in the unit 20, two reels only or more than three reels may be provided as required. Instead of one slot 11 only being provided to receive coins of all denominations, if desired a separate coin slot may be provided for each different coin denomination accommodated. In this event, the coin feed mechanism 10 would have to be modified so that upon a coin being inserted into one slot, if the coin is accepted by the coin feed mechanism, the coin is fed directly to the selector mechanism which accommodates that

same denomination of coins.

Although the selector mechanisms 17, 18, 19 described each comprise a collector 25 having a straight tube 26 with a slot cut therein, it will be appreciated that the tube 26 may be bent so that there is an angle between the upper 30 and lower 31 parts of the tube 26.

The collector 25 may comprise a coin handling apparatus such as described and claimed in our co-pending application published under number 2,127,606A and the coin handling apparatus thereof may have any of the features described in that prior application.

Instead of the ejector mechanism 37 described, any alternative type of mechanism for ejecting a coin from the collector 25 may be provided and although as described this has been operable to eject a coin from tube 26 each time five coins are fed from the coin feed mechanism to the selector mechanism, the ejector device 37 can be arranged to operate when any predetermined number of coins have been inserted. For example, the ejector device 37 may only operate when ten coins have been fed to the selector mechanism, or as few as three coins.

The push elements 36 need not be resiliently biased by springs 40 as shown, but could be resiliently biased by any other means, or need not be resiliently biased at all, where the solenoids 38 are arranged to be double acting.

Although as shown separate windows 42 are provided in the housing of the machine for each of the coin storage compartments 41 of selector mechanisms 17, 18, 19, of course one large window may be provided whereby a player may view the contents of the coin storage compartments of the selector mechanisms 17, 18, 19 together, although this window is not an essential feature of the invention and may be omitted if required.

Although as described, the coin storage compartments 41 each comprise a tube of transparent plastics material, the tubes 41 may be constructed in other materials as required. Furthermore, it is not essential for the tubes 41 to be cylindrical as shown, but could be square or of any other configuration. Where the tubes are square, the length of the sides of the squares would have to be slightly greater than the diameter of the coins accommodated in the tube. If the tubes are not transparent, windows may be provided so that the contents can be seen.

Although a single coin payout chute 48 has been described, a separate coin payout chute could be provided for each of the selector mechanisms 17, 18 and 19 and if required, a separate cashbox 32 also provided to accommodate coins of one denomination only.

Preferably the control means 13 is microprocessor controlled although could be mechanical if required.

CLAIMS

1. A gaming machine of the kind specified including a coin feed mechanism into which coins are fed by a player, means to guide coins from the coin feed mechanism to a coin storage compartment, control means to randomly select a combination of

symbols, a payout mechanism operable under the control of said control means to pay out all or substantially all the coins stored in the coin storage compartment when a selected winning combination of symbols is indicated.

2. A machine according to Claim 1 wherein the coins in the coin storage compartment are visible through a window in a housing of the machine so that a player can determine, generally, how many coins are stored in said compartment.

3. A machine according to Claim 1 or Claim 2 wherein the machine comprises a selector mechanism having a collector to collect coins fed to the selector mechanism from the coin feed mechanism, and a coin ejection device operable to eject a coin from said collector each time a pre-selected number of coins have been fed from said coin feed mechanism to said selector mechanism, the ejected coins being guided to the coin storage compartment.

4. A machine according to Claim 3 wherein a plurality of selector mechanisms are provided, each accommodating coins of a single denomination only and having its own coin storage compartment, the coin feed mechanism being operable to feed coins of one denomination only to an associated selector mechanism.

5. A machine according to Claim 4 wherein the coin feed mechanism has a slot for each different coin denomination accommodated by the machine and means to feed coins from their respective slots to the associated selector mechanism.

6. A machine according to Claim 4 wherein the coin feed mechanism has a single slot for all different coin denominations and means responsive to one or more coin parameters to deliver a coin fed into the machine to the associated selector mechanism.

7. A machine according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the coin feed mechanism has sensors to test that the coin introduced is a valid coin of the realm or a valid money token, and a coin denomination accommodated by the machine, and reject means to reject any coins which do not pass the test applied.

8. A machine according to any one of Claims 4 to 7 wherein when a selected winning combination of symbols is indicated, the payout mechanism of the machine is arranged to pay out all the coins in one of the coin storage compartments only.

9. A machine according to Claim 8 wherein the coin storage compartment which is emptied is determined randomly by the control means of the machine when a selected winning combination of symbols is displayed.

10. A machine according to Claim 8 wherein where there is more than one winning combination, payout from which coin storage compartment depends on which winning combination is indicated.

11. A machine according to Claim 8 wherein the coin storage compartment emptied depends on the coin denomination last inserted into the machine.

12. A machine according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the control means of the machine is operable to count the number of coins fed from the coin feed mechanism to the or each

selector mechanism and to signal a coin ejection device to eject a coin to the coin storage compartment, when the pre-selected number of coins have been counted.

13. A machine according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the payout mechanism for the or each coin storage compartment comprises a gate which is movable from a normally closed position wherein coins are prevented from passing from the coin storage compartment, to an open position wherein the coins may pass from the coin storage compartment, means being provided to guide the coins which pass from the coin storage compartment to a payout chute from where the player may collect his winnings.

14. A machine according to Claim 13 wherein the gate of the payout mechanism is opened electrically, under the control of the control means, and is closed electrically, or mechanically under the control of a spring means.

15. A gaming machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

16. A selector mechanism for a gaming machine of the kind specified comprising a collector to collect coins fed to the selector mechanism, a coin ejection device operable to eject a coin from said collector each time a pre-selected number of coins have been fed to the selector mechanism, and means to guide said ejected coins to a coin storage compartment.

17. A selector mechanism according to Claim 16 having any of the features of the selector mechanism of the gaming machine according to any one of Claims 3 to 15 where appendant to Claim 3.

18. A selector mechanism according to Claim 16 or Claim 17 wherein the collector comprises means for enabling coins fed thereto to form a stack, the coins of the stack exerting a downwards force on the lowermost coin of the stack.

19. A selector mechanism according to Claim 18 wherein the coin ejection device is operable to eject the lowermost coin of the stack.

20. A selector mechanism according to Claim 19 wherein the ejection device comprises a push element which moves laterally relative to the stack, to eject the lowermost coin through an opening in the collector.

21. A selector mechanism according to Claim 20 wherein the push element is electrically actuated.

22. A selector mechanism according to Claim 21 wherein the selector mechanism is resiliently biased away from said opening.

23. A selector mechanism according to Claim 21 or Claim 22 wherein the ejection device operates upon receipt of a signal from a control means of the machine.

24. A selector mechanism according to any one of Claims 16 to 23 wherein the coin storage compartment of the or each selector mechanism comprises a vertical, or substantially vertical, tube having an inner diameter only slightly larger than the external diameter of the coins to be stored therein, so that coins ejected thereto form a stack within the tube.

25. A selector mechanism according to Claim 24 wherein the tube has means for mounting a payout

mechanism at the lowermost end of the tube.

26. A selector mechanism according to Claim 24 or Claim 25 wherein the tube is transparent, or provided with a window to enable a player to view
5 the contents of the tube.

27. A selector mechanism substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

28. A collector for a selector mechanism according to any one of Claims 16 to 27 comprising a tube
10 having an inner diameter only slightly larger than the external diameter of the coins the selector mechanism is to accommodate.

29. A collector according to Claim 28 wherein the
15 collector includes a coin handling apparatus as claimed in our co-pending application published under number 2,127,606A.

30. A collector according to Claim 28 or Claim 29 which is provided as a plastics moulding.

20 31. A collector substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

32. Any novel feature or novel combination of features disclosed herein and/or shown in the
25 accompanying drawings.